



News Release

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Educational Leaders, Granholm Weigh In On Voucher Ruling State Leaders Stand Tall For Public Education

The U.S. Supreme Court today affirmed public school vouchers as constitutional, but the ruling has no effect on Michigan's 555 public school districts.

"While this ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court is significant, it does not affect Michigan and its system of public schools," said Robert Sedler, professor of constitutional law at Wayne State University's College of Law and an expert on Michigan's Constitution. "The Michigan Constitution prohibits any use of public funds to support private schools K-12. No public dollars can be used, directly or indirectly, to fund private schools in our state. The entire issue is black and white."

Under the Michigan Constitution, Article 8, Section 2, the Michigan Legislature is obligated to maintain and support a system of free public education for all students. The Constitution also states:

No public monies or property shall be appropriated or paid or any public credit utilized, by the legislature or any other political subdivision or agency of the state directly or indirectly to aid or maintain any private, denominational or other non-public, pre-elementary, elementary, or secondary school.

"Michigan's constitutional framers clearly wanted public dollars to support only public schools," said Kathleen Straus, State Board of Education President. "Vouchers do nothing more than drain public money away from our public schools, and do not level the playing field between rich and poor students."

Since 1966, vouchers or voucher-related measures have been placed in front of American voters in 13 states and the District of Columbia 22 times. With the lone exception of South Dakota (which approved only the provision of textbooks to parochial schools in 1986), voters have rejected public aid to support private and religious schools every time.

In November 2000, Michigan voters overwhelmingly defeated Proposal 1, a well-financed voucher proposal, with 70 percent of the voters saying no.

"Michigan's voters made it clear in 2000 with Proposal 1 - they want absolutely nothing to do with school vouchers," said Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Watkins. "We have no conclusive evidence that vouchers improve school performance, and they do not bring accountability to education. We need to direct our efforts toward supporting our neighborhood public schools, not dragging them down with dangerous schemes that only harm the learning environment. I find it absolutely absurd that our federal courts can rule that school vouchers are constitutional, but also say that the pledge of allegiance isn't."

Attorney General Jennifer Granholm also affirmed Michigan's constitutional mandate to support the state's public schools.

"Our Constitution is absolutely clear on this point: This state cannot support vouchers in any form without a change in the law by the people," Granholm said. "Private and parochial schools play a role in educating approximately 10 percent of our children, but public schools must remain our focus. I vigorously oppose private school vouchers and any other attempt to siphon public funds away from public schools."